

APPLICATION FOR
UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT
SPECIFICATION

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Be it known that I, Mark B. Oesch, a citizen of the United States of America, and resident of the State of Texas, having a postal address of 603 E. 29th Street, #22, Bryan, TX 77803, have invented a new and useful “**PILL DISPENSER**”, of which the following forms the specification.

PILL DISPENSER

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is entitled to the benefit of provisional application no. 60/411,373 filed on September 17, 2002.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a device that may be conveniently attached to a pill bottle allowing a user to individually dispense a pill therefrom.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRIOR ART

Many vitamins and medications are typically produced in pill, capsule or tablet form, which are stored in bottles often having an instructional label thereon. The capsule bottle almost always includes a safety or childproof cap that is cumbersome and difficult to remove. Such caps are particularly troubling for the elderly or those afflicted with arthritis or similar ailments. In addition, once the cap has been removed, dispensing a single pill from the bottle is almost impossible.

Although various pill dispensers exist in the prior art, most include integral pill storage chambers requiring the pills to be transferred from the original container to the dispenser. Accordingly, it is usually not feasible to transfer the dosage and refill instructions from the original bottle to the dispenser.

A myriad of pill dispensers exist in the prior art. For example, U.S. patent no. 4,523,694 issued to Veltri discloses a dispensing cap including a stationary inner cap attached to a pill bottle neck, an outer cap rotatably connected to the inner cap and a rotor disposed therebetween. The inner cap, outer cap and rotor each have a discharge port which can be selectively aligned to dispense a single pill.

U.S. patent no. 4,460,106 issued to Moulding, Jr. et al. discloses a pill dispenser including multiple compartments each having slots or openings for allowing passage of pills therethrough. A second compartment is rotated to a first position whereby the openings in the first and second compartments are aligned allowing a pill to travel from the first compartment to the second compartment. The second compartment can then be rotated to a second position whereby the apertures on the first and second compartments are misaligned and the apertures on the second and third compartments are aligned allowing the pill to be dispensed from the second compartment.

U.S. patent no. 3,601,250 issued to Merila discloses a pill dispensing cap including a pair of chambers attached to a pill bottle each having a pill dispensing opening thereon. One of the chambers can be rotated relative to the other to align the openings.

U.S. patent no. 3,746,154 issued to Gach discloses a tablet dispenser having a tablet passageway with a gravity actuated retainer that slides across the passageway when the tablet bottle is tipped.

U.S. patent no. 5,791,515 issued to Khan et al. discloses a pill dispenser
5 whereby rotation of the device in a first direction allows a pill to fall into a dispensing chamber; rotation in a reverse direction releases the pill onto a user's hand.

Each of the above described dispensers requires that a user rotate various components to effect the release of a pill, which requires both hands and is
10 cumbersome, particularly for an elderly person. Furthermore, accurately aligning dispensing apertures to allow passage of a single pill can be nearly impossible.

The present invention overcomes the above-described problems by providing a pill dispenser that can be quickly and conveniently attached to a conventional pill bottle for individually dispensing a pill therefrom. The dispenser includes a

15 reciprocal plunger mechanism that is depressed to dispense a single pill from a dispensing chamber; furthermore, a cooperating spring mechanism simultaneously blocks passage of pills from the bottle to the dispensing chamber to assure that only a single pill is dispensed at any given time. The unique design also allows the device to be operated with one hand.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention discloses a pill dispenser that attaches to a conventional medicine bottle or container. The device comprises a hollow housing having an upper end and a lower end with the upper end having an internally threaded collar thereon for coupling the housing to the externally threaded neck of a conventional pill bottle. Within the housing is a tubular passageway having a frustoconical entrance positioned proximal the upper end of the housing that is in communication with the pill bottle interior when the housing is properly secured thereto. Extending outwardly from the housing is a spring-biased plunger having an inboard portion and an outboard portion. On the inboard portion are a plurality of linear gear teeth that engage a rotary gear whereby reciprocation of the plunger results in rotation of the gear. A release arm is attached to the gear that pivots into and out of the passageway as the plunger is reciprocated to release a pill through a dispensing opening on the bottom of the passageway. At a distal end of the inboard portion are a plurality of separator springs that are thrust into the passageway when the plunger is depressed. The area between the separator springs and release arm defines a dispensing chamber. The springs, when thrust into the passageway, assure that only a single pill is positioned in the dispensing chamber at any one time. A biasing spring is likewise

positioned on the distal end of the plunger and rests against the passageway outer wall to bias the plunger outwardly.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a pill dispenser that allows a user to individually dispense pills from a conventional pill bottle.

5 It is another object of the present invention to provide a pill dispenser that can be used in conjunction with a conventional pill container allowing a user to retain instructional information thereon.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide a dispenser that eliminates the need for a user to manipulate safety caps on conventional pill
10 containers.

Other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become readily apparent from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiment when considered with the attached drawings and the appended claims.

15 **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

Figure 1 depicts a front view of the dispenser properly secured to a conventional medicine bottle, with the internal components depicted in phantom.

Figure 2 is a front, cross-sectional view of the housing.

Figure 3 is a cross-sectional view of the housing rotated 90° relative to the

view depicted in Figure 2, with the internal components depicted in phantom.

Figure 4 is a detailed view of the plunger and pill release mechanism with the release arm in a restraining position.

Figure 5 is a detailed view of the plunger and release mechanism with the
5 release arm pivoted to a release position.

Figure 6 is a detailed view of the pill release mechanism rotated 90° relative to the views depicted in Figures 4 and 5.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

The present invention discloses a pill dispenser for use with a conventional
10 medicine bottle. The device comprises a hollow housing **1** having an upper end **3** and a lower end **5** with the upper end having an internally threaded collar **31** thereon. The collar threadedly couples the housing to the externally threaded neck on a conventional pill bottle **7**. The device could include an adapter for coupling the housing with varying sized bottles.

15 Within the housing is a tubular passageway **2** defined by a continuous outer wall extending from the upper end to the lower end. A top end of the passageway includes a frustoconical entrance **25** positioned at an upper end of the housing that is in communication with the pill bottle interior when the housing is properly secured thereto. The passageway also includes a bottom end in communication

with a dispensing opening **45** on the lower end of the housing.

Extending outwardly from the housing is a spring-biased reciprocal plunger **6** having an inboard portion **8** and an outboard portion **10**. On the inboard portion are a plurality of linear gear teeth **12** that engage a rotary gear **14** whereby
5 reciprocation of the plunger rotates the gear. The rotary gear is supported by a boss **43**. A release arm **16** is fixedly attached to the rotary gear that pivots into and out of the passageway, between a restraining and a release position. The arm moves into and out of the passageway through a slot as the plunger is reciprocated to selectively release a pill through the dispensing opening. A distal end of the
10 arm has a disc shaped seal **20** thereon that seals the passageway when the arm pivots to the restraining position as depicted in Figure 4.

At a distal end of the plunger inboard portion are a plurality of separator springs **41** that are thrust into passageway openings when the plunger is depressed. The area between the separator springs and the release arm defines a dispensing
15 chamber **40**. The separator springs are protected by an encapsulating rubber diaphragm **24** that also seals the passageway openings through which the springs are inserted and retracted. The separator springs prevent additional pills contained within the medicine container from falling into the dispensing chamber. Springs are an effective means for blocking the pills because they can easily penetrate

conglomerated pills.

An adjustment screw **32** extends through the seal, which can be adjusted upwardly or downwardly to effectively vary the size of the dispensing chamber according to the pill size to assure that only one pill fits into the dispensing
5 chamber. A biasing spring **26** is likewise positioned between the distal end of the plunger inboard portion and the passageway outer wall to bias the plunger outwardly from the housing. A stop member **28** on the inboard portion prevents the plunger from being completely ejected from the housing.

To use the above-described device, the lid on a pill container is removed
10 and the housing collar is coupled with the threaded neck. The container is inverted so that pills within the container drop into the passageway entrance. The plunger is depressed to pivot the arm to a release position whereby a pill is delivered from the dispensing chamber through the dispensing opening.

Contemporaneously, the separator springs are thrust into the passageway to
15 prevent additional pills from dropping into the dispensing chamber. When the plunger is released, the arm pivots back to a restraining position with the seal tightly positioned within the passageway. Simultaneously, the biasing spring forces the springs out of the passageway allowing a pill to fall into the dispensing chamber.

Although there has been shown and described the preferred embodiment of the present invention, it will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art that modifications may be made thereto which do not exceed the scope of the appended claims. Therefore, the scope of the invention is only to be limited by the following

5 claims.